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ABSTRACT

Well-organized career information, guidance, and counseling services are important both to education systems, the labor market, and their interface. Career education is important within compulsory education because it lays the foundations for lifelong career development. In postcompulsory education, well-organized career information, guidance, and counseling services promote outcomes that help make better use of educational resources and increase both individual and social returns to investments in education. Within the labor market, well-organized career information, guidance, and counseling services can do the following things: (1) help improve individual decision making about jobs and training opportunities and improve the allocation of human talents within the labor market; (2) help improve the allocation of labor across regions, industries, and occupations in the face of labor demand fluctuations resulting from technological and structural change; and (3) affect the success of active labor market programs and active welfare-to-work programs. For these and other reasons, well-organized career information, guidance, and counseling services need to be high on national public policy agendas. The emphasis on lifelong learning and sustaining employability has implications for how such services should be provided. Possible roles for states in relation to such services are as follows: direct provider; main funder; residual funding source in areas of market failure; and quality assurer. (MN)

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WHY CAREER INFORMATION, GUIDANCE AND COUNSELLING MATTER FOR PUBLIC POLICY

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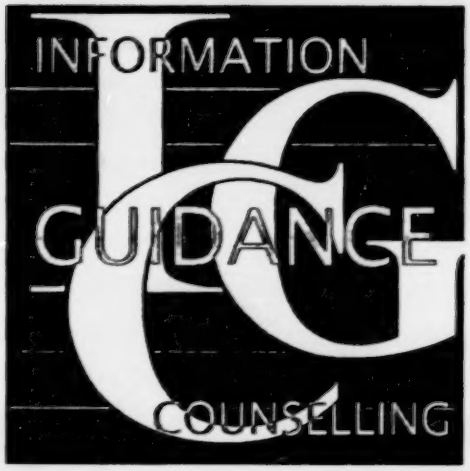

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WHY CAREER INFORMATION, GUIDANCE AND COUNSELLING MATTER FOR PUBLIC POLICY

If the OECD review of career guidance policies is to act as a change agent and to raise the policy profile of the issues which it is addressing, it is important to develop a clear rationale for the relationship of career information and guidance to lifelong learning, and to active labour-market strategies and welfare-to-work strategies, supported by policy tools which will attract sustained attention.

This paper presents an initial statement in this respect. It is proposed to continue to develop the paper:

- *By using it as appropriate as a discussion tool in the country visits.*
- *By using it as a basis for discussions with relevant experts in-house within OECD.*
- *By using it to review the briefs for future commissioned papers from external experts.*
- *By discussing a revised version at the review's Analytical Conference in September.*
- *By incorporating appropriate parts of the paper in the final report.*
- *Possibly, by publishing key elements of the final version as a short document alongside the final report, and using it as a working document in subsequent dissemination activities.*

1. What is career information, guidance and counselling?

1.1 Career information, guidance and counselling refers to services that assist individuals, of any age and at any point throughout their lives, to make educational, training and occupational choices and to manage their careers. It includes services provided to those who have not yet entered the labour force, services to job seekers, and services to those who are employed.

1.2 It includes a wide range of activities. For example:

- Activities within schools to help students clarify career goals, understand the world of work and develop career-management skills;
- Personal advice, guidance or counselling to assist with decisions about initial courses of study, courses of vocational training, further education and training, initial job choice, job change, or work-force re-entry;
- The organised and systematic use of community members such as employers, alumni, parents and peers to provide occupational and educational advice and information; and
- Print-based, computer-based or on-line services to produce and disseminate information about jobs and careers, courses of study and vocational training to help individuals make career choices.

2. Why does it matter?

2.1 Well-organised career information, guidance and counselling services are important both to education systems and to the labour market, as well as to their interface. Many arguments in support of this assertion are long-standing, but have been strengthened or refined by more recent developments within education systems and labour markets: both by trends in the ways that these are organised and operate; and

by thinking within public-policy and other fora on how they might be organised and operate more effectively. There are analogies between the importance that well-organised systems of information and advice play in improving the efficiency of education systems and labour markets, and the role that they play in improving the efficiency of financial or other markets. Ignorance is rarely bliss, and information about complex systems is often insufficient by itself. It needs careful organisation and can need sympathetic interpretation if it is to be of value in improving decision making. Context and relevance, trust and shared understanding, each help to mediate information flows and information use.

2.2 *Within education systems,* career education has an important role to play within compulsory education in laying the foundations for lifelong career development. These include knowledge and competences regarding self awareness, the world of work, and making decisions and transitions.

2.3 Well-organised career information, guidance and counselling are particularly important in post-compulsory education. Here, wider curriculum choice results in more diverse and complex routes into later stages of education, into employment, or into both. Where choices are more complex and their consequences are more costly, effective advice and guidance on educational options, and on links between these options and later occupational destinations, can help to better match individuals' learning choices to their interests, talents and intended destinations. This can help to:

- Reduce dropouts from and back-tracking within education systems, and thus improve internal flows;
- Improve flows between different levels of education, thus raising national levels of educational attainment; and
- Improve transitions from education to the labour market.

These outcomes help to make better use of educational resources, and to increase both individual and social returns to investments in education.

2.4 Arguments within education systems for the importance of well-organised systems of career information, guidance and counselling receive greater prominence when national governments commit themselves to implementing policy frameworks that can make lifelong learning for all a reality. This is because the notion of lifelong learning stresses:

- The central role of individual learner demands in driving the learning that is provided, how it is provided and where and when it is provided. (This implies substantial flexibility and diversity within education systems, and more complex frameworks for learner choice. A consumer-driven learning system implies attention to the information and advisory systems needed to make decisions efficient).
- Stronger links between education systems and the labour market, and better systems for translating labour market signals into educational choices.
- Wider access to learning throughout all stages of life, often by those who have been away from formal learning for many years.
- Wider access to learning by groups who are under-confident in, unskilled in, or unused to negotiating access to, complex learning systems. If such individuals are to have wider access to learning, many will need to have access to the information and advice required to make it possible.

2.5 ***Within the labour market,*** well-organised career information, guidance and counselling can:

- Improve the accuracy and accessibility of the information available to individuals about short- and long-term job opportunities. In turn this can improve individual decision making about jobs and about job training opportunities, and improve the allocation of human talents within the labour market. In particular, well-organised career information, guidance and counselling can help to:
  - Achieve a better match between skills, interests and qualifications on the one hand and available job opportunities on the other; and
  - Unearth the talents of those who are not favoured by life's circumstances, thus improving the social and intergenerational mobility of talent.
- Help to improve the allocation of labour across regions, industries and occupations in the face of labour supply and demand fluctuations resulting from technological and structural change; and
- Make a key difference between the successful and unsuccessful implementation of active labour market programmes and active welfare-to-work programmes (together with other support services).

2.6 These roles for career information, guidance and counselling services becomes increasingly relevant as human knowledge and skill come to play an increased role, compared to capital and labour, in national economic performance. They become still more important in the context of discussions about new concepts of careers that emphasise individual responsibility for career management, and individual and corporate responsibility for developing employability skills, often as a substitute for long- term commitment or loyalty.

3. Does it matter how it is provided?

3.1 The argument thus far implies that well-organised career information, guidance and counselling services need to be high on national public-policy agendas. The emphasis on lifelong learning and sustaining employability also has implications for *how* such services should be provided. It implies that career information, guidance and counselling services need to:

- Be provided in a variety of settings: not only educational institutions and employment offices but also workplaces and community settings;
- Be provided in a variety of sectors; not only the public sector but also the private and community sectors;
- Allocate an important role to informal and non-professional sources of information and guidance such as alumni, local employers, community members, parents and peers as well as to formal professional sources;
- Achieve a balance between universal access and the targeting of public resources to those who most need them; and

- Play a proactive role, helping individuals to create new options, as well as fitting them into existing jobs and courses. This implies:
  - Advocacy on individuals' behalf, and support for their self-advocacy on their own behalf;
  - Feedback to learning providers on learners' unmet needs; and
  - Encouraging and supporting the skills of career management, not simply facilitating initial educational and occupational choices.

4. How might we know if it is meeting key public policy objectives?

4.1 There are a number of questions that governments might ask to assess the extent to which career information, guidance and counselling services are meeting key public policy objectives. For example:

- What is the extent of *access* to career information and guidance provision?
- What mechanisms are used for assuring the *quality* of such provision?
- To what extent is *ICT* used to widen access and increase cost-effectiveness?
- What range of individuals and organisations are involved in service delivery, and how adequate are arrangements for the *training* of guidance practitioners?
- How and to what extent is the diverse provision of services effectively *co-ordinated*?
- How adequate are arrangements for developing an *evidence base* to support service delivery?

5. What ways forward might there be?

5.1 Differences in institutions and traditions both constrain and provide opportunities in different countries. All countries face choices in the ways that career information, guidance and counselling services can be configured to meet key public goals such as lifelong learning for all and active labour market policies. One way to elaborate upon these options is to develop "scenarios" or "models". These would incorporate a range of dimensions, and of options within each dimension. Possible dimensions for such scenarios, and examples of options within these, might include:

5.2 *The role of the state*

- Direct provider.
- Main funder.
- Residual funding source in areas of market failure.
- Quality assurer.

5.3 *The role of the profession and other parties*

- Professionally qualified staff act as the principal provider of services.
- Organisations representing professionally qualified staff act as the principal standard setters and quality assurers.
- Substantial service provision occurs through para-professionals such as information officers and subject teachers.
- Substantial service delivery occurs through community members such as parents, employers, alumni and peers.

5.4 *Delivery settings*

- Services are mainly provided in educational institutions.
- Services are mainly provided in educational institutions and public employment offices.
- Services are provided in a wide range of community and voluntary sector settings in addition to educational institutions and public employment offices.
- The private sector is active in providing career guidance services, both for a fee and within enterprises for its employees.
- A wide range of services is provided electronically: by telephone; on the Internet.

5.5 *Methods of finance and governance*

- Governments directly pay for and provide virtually all services, with little contribution by individuals or enterprises.
- Nearly all service delivery staff are employed by central government organisations.
- Governments pay for virtually all services, but provide very few directly, with most services being provided under contract by a wide range of decentralised agencies.
- Governments pay for services to designated target groups -- mostly youth, the disadvantaged and those on low incomes -- and individuals and enterprises pay for the bulk of other services.
- Governments control quality through the qualifications that are required of the staff who they employ to provide services and through the quality implicit in public delivery.
- Voluntary standards, developed by professional associations of guidance workers, exist for staff skills/ staff qualifications/service delivery/career information.
- Government-developed or -endorsed standards exist for staff skills/staff qualifications/service delivery/career information and are used as a basis for resource allocation, recruitment decisions and the like.

- Governments fund considerable research and evaluation on the outcomes and effectiveness of career guidance services.
- Many academic centres exist to train guidance staff and award them recognised qualifications.
- A large body of academic research and publication exists in the field of career guidance.

5.6 *Information organisation and delivery*

- Most career information is created and disseminated by governments.
- Governments contract out most of the production of career information, both print and electronic, to private publishers.
- A large number of private publishers compete to produce and sell print and electronic career information. Government-funded organisations such as schools and employment services are funded to purchase information from their preferred private suppliers.
- The production of "league tables" or guides that rank institutions allowing potential students to compare post-secondary educational institutions is common in the private market for career information and is encouraged by governments.
- Information on salaries, employment rates, vacancy rates and the like is standard in occupational information.
- Educational and course information regularly includes information on student destinations, employment rates, earnings and the like.

5.7 *Access/client base*

- Most of the clients for career guidance services are students and public employment service clients.
- Adults form a significant proportion of services' clients.

5.8 *An example*

<u>The Traditional/Bureaucratic/Professionalised model</u>

- Professionally qualified staff act as the principal provider of services.
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- Most career information is created and disseminated by governments.
- Most of the clients for career guidance services are students and public employment service clients.

This might be contrasted to other models (which will be elaborated in future working drafts of this paper). For example:

- A Diffused Community-Based model.
- A Market model.

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